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A BRIEF ANATOMY OF THE "MAHABHARATHA"

by

S.M. PASHA

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Haji S.M. Pasha has travelled extensively both within the country and abroad. He has visited Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, London, U.A.E., Kuwait and Canada.

PREFACE

"Mahabharatha" is wrongly said to be a religious scripture and it is equally wrong to take it as such. Since it is not so and since its *dramatis personae* are, after all, ordinary mortals, and NOT gods and goddesses, they are NOT above systematic and scientific scrutiny and criticism. This booklet, dear readers, is a purely dispassionate, straight-forward, fair and just literary analysis of the characters and of the then prevailing society. If anyone finds anything incorrect or objectionable in this booklet, he or she is most welcome to point it out to me. No offence - not even the slightest - is meant and it is my fond and fervent hope that none will be taken. But still, if anyone feels hurt, I, hereby, tender my sincere and unqualified apologies and beg to be excused.

If readers understand my analysis and appreciate it, I will consider that my labour is not lost but is, actually, a grand success!

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6th December 2006

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"A BRIEF ANATOMY OF THE MAHABHARATHA"

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"A BRIEF ANATOMY OF THE MAHABHARATHA"

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Mahabharatha" narrates a long story of Royal family's internecine war. In course of the narration, tales of the ancestors of the heroes, who fought with one another, are given. To be more specific, the heroes of the fierce battle were the rulers of Hastinapura, situated near our modern Delhi. Amongst these rulers, the most outstanding was Bharatha, the son of King *Dushyantha* and Queen *Shunkunthala.* From the name of an individual *"Bharatha"*, comes the word *'Bharatha'* which means either any descendant of *"Bharatha"* or "any aspect of *Bharatha"* and *"maha"* means 'great'. Therefore, "Mahabharatha" means either "a great story of *Bharatha"* or "a story of the great *Bharatha"*. "Mahabharatha", in its earlier form, was just a small story and had a small name *"Jaya"* (meaning: 'Victory'). Thus, originally and actually, Mahabharatha was a small and simple poem, (which narrated the story of the victory of a particular king over his rival royal kinsmen) but it was subsequently magnified into an epic with 18 *"Parvas"* with a total number of 82,564 *"Slokas."* (couplets)

Sanskrit language has been, since time immemorial, the exclusive domain of the so-called "Upper-Caste"

Brahmins. There were two categories of Sanskrit literature viz., the *"SAUTA"* literature and the *"MANTRA"* literature. The former embodied the secular and political tradition of Sanskrit literature, whilst the latter embodied hymns to gods and goddesses and description of religious rituals and minute details about sacrifices. Such books were called the *"BRAHMANAS"*, the *"UPANISHADS"* and the *"ARAYANKAS"*. This category of Sanskrit literature,

Later on, branched into grammar, semantics, philosophy, Astronomy etc., As stated earlier, this branch, which represented, initially, titual and religious literature and subsequently, speculative and philosophical literature, was exclusively in the hands of the so-called "upper caste" and so- called "priestly" class BRAHMINS.

Let us see what this *"SAUTA"* literature was. There was, in ancient India, a class of people called *"SUTAS"*, who represented the illegitimate children of the *"KSHTRIYAS"*. These bastards used to be counsellors and courtiers of kings and princes, and quite a number of Sutas used to move from one place to another as bards, singing songs, consisting of stories of the loves and the adventures of ancient kings and princes. Even the RAMAYANA, like the MAHABHARATHA, was one such *SAUTA* story or one such PURANA. *"PURANA"* means 'ancient' or 'the story of the past'. Thus, it was the SUTAS, who narrated the RAMAYANA, even as they **narrated** the MAHABHARATHA. The Mahabharatha and the Ramayana, at a certain point of time, went from the *SUTAS* into the keeping of the *BRAHMIN* clan named "BHRIGU". This cunning clan seized the golden opportunity to add the stories of its Brahminical clan to the epics. It must be incidentally pointed out that not only

the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha but also all the literary tradition in Sanskrit passed into the hands of (nay, it was seized, ingeniously, by) the Brahmins, who became the vigilant and jealous custodians of this literature which, they twisted and moulded, from time to time, as suited their interests.

People confuse (or are made, purposely, to become confused) the "Mahabharatha" with the "Bhagavad Gita". The latter is only a small part of the long narration. In Mahabharatha, there are stories within stories. And another feature of this long narration is that it is narrated not by one narrator, as is generally believed, but by many narrators. In the forests of Naimisha, the Brahmin Shaunaka was engaged in performing a ritual, which had to go on for twelve years, as it involved many kinds of rites and sacrifices in the mornings and in the evenings. The afternoons were free. The performance of this great ritual required the presence and assistance of several priests and it also attracted many 'other caste' people who gathered there to help the Brahmins to perform the *'Yagna'*. Where large number of people assemble, bards come there to entertain them with songs of love and adventures. Amongst the bards, who came there, were the *SUTA* story-teller and songster by name LOMAHARSHANA and his son UGRASHRAVA. The people, who had gathered there, implored them to tell them about the love adventures and exploits of ancient kings and queens, and other Kshtriya heroes and heroines. Ugrashrava told the gathering how he had visited the court of King Janamejaya of Hastinapura. He also narrated **how Janamejaya of Hastinapura performed a sacrifice in which all the NAGAS were to be killed.** This sacrifice was

undertaken to avenge the assassination of his father King Parikshita by a NAGA. The Suta narrator further said that the terrible sacrifice was cleverly stopped by a man named Astika. The sage VYASA appeared before King Janamejaya and persuaded him to give up ideas of revenge. Janamejaya agreed but expressed a wish to hear the story and (wanted the people who had gathered there to listen to the story) of his noble ancestors. Vyasa deputed one of his disciples named VAISHAMPAYANA to tell the story.

The story of 'Mahabharatha' as stated earlier, has eighteen divisions; each division is called a *'PARVA'*. The episode of the Kurukshetra War is narrated by Sanjay and it begins in the sixth Parva viz., the Bhishmaparva. Thus, Ugrashrava was the first narrator of the 'Mahabharatha' followed by Vaishapayana and then by Sanjay and several other narrators recounting occasional stories of lesser importance. In short, the entire 'Mahabharatha' was NOT written or narrated by *Vyasa*. Vyasa might have, at best, arranged the stories narrated by many narrators for the word *"Vyasa"* means in Sanskrit "an arranger". Vyasa's actual name was Krishna Dvaipayana. Thus, it is clear as daylight that the 'Mahabaratha is not all a divine revelation or a religious scripture but just a story narrated by a number of *Suta* bards. Since the 'Mahabharatha' is not a religious scripture but just a fiction, its characters, including KRISHNA are NOT divine but ordinary human mortals and most of the characters in the epic belong to the Kshtriya caste barring a few Brahmins like Drona and Parushrama. Vaishiyas and Shudharas are not at all mentioned in the entire long story, for the upper-caste Brahmins and Kshtriyas held it infra-dig even to include the lower-caste people in the narration.

CHAPTER - II

THE ROLE OF KRISHNA IN THE STORY

As pointed out earlier, the 'Mahabharatha' is not a divine revelation nor it is a religious scripture but just a long folklore about great Kshtriya kings and queens, their love affairs and their fights and other personal and political events and episodes. The characters in the epic are not gods and goddesses but ordinary human mortals. KRISHNA is one the characters in the epic and he, too, like all others, is just a man, whose great ambition was to become a *"Vasudeva"* - a position nearing divinity. What exactly is meant by *"Vasudeva"* is not made clear in the 'Mahabharatha'. All that one can gather is that *'Vasudeva'* was apparently a title which could be borne by only one person in a *'Yuga'* or an age or era. Though, in the Bhagavad Gita (which forms a part of the 'Mahabharatha' narration) he declares that he has no ambition and personal goals to attain, yet, in reality, he had many political and personal goals, which he strove to attain.

Krishna enters the story of the 'Mahabharatha' at the end of the first 'Parva' namely the *"Adiparva"*. The Mahabharatha says nothing at all about his birth, his childhood, his boyhood and his life at Vridhavan and Mathura. Only the later Puranas such as the 'HARIVAMSA' and the 'BHAGAVATA' mention this.

KRISHNA, like all other [illegible] of his time, had MANY wives, of whom Sathyabhama was the eldest and therefore the most important. Rukmani, who is mentioned just once or twice in the epic, assumes, in the later Puranas, more importance than Sathyabhama. Krishna, shown in the 'Mahabharatha' has absolutely no resemblance whatsoever to the flute-playing, ever green, romantic lover of young unmarried damsels. The Krishna of 'Mahabharatha' was a ruthless killer besides being a shrewd and ambitious politician, who believed that the ends justify the means and so was not all bothered about the means he adopted (and wanted his allies to adopt) to destroy enemies and to achieve their cherished goals. He, either killed his enemies himself, if that was possible or else had them killed by his friends. For example, he arranged to get Kamsa killed because it was not possible for him to kill him. Likewise, knowing that it was difficult to defeat and kill Jarasandha (Kamsa's father-in-law) in a full battle, he persuaded Bhima to kill him (Jarasandha) in a single combat.

Dharma, the eldest of the Pandavas, who is also known as Yudhishtira, after settling down and making Indraprastha his capital city, decided, on Krishna's advice to perform the "Rajasuya" yagna (a sacrifice which, if performed sucessfully, makes a king a *"SAMRAT"* or a King of Kings). On the last day of the Yagna, only one ritual remained and that was the ritual of honouring the assembled Kshtriya kings, princes and heroes, giving special recognition to the eldest or the wisest or the best amongst them. Dharma chose Krishna for this special honour. King Shishupala (Krishna's rival cousin) was one of the invitees. He objected to Krishna being given the

special honour instead of the elders like Bhishma or Vidura. Tension in the gathering rose as Shishupala spoke. Shishupala appealed the assembled brother Kshtriya chieftains to walk out of the Yagna and challenge the Pandavas to a fight. To save the Pandavas. his allies, the "cool headed" Krishna got up and in wild anger threw his deadly discus, which promptly cut off Shishupala's head. Shocked, beyond words, the assembled Kshtriya guests, sat benumbed, watching Krishna being honoured as a special guest. Thus, the Yagna. which ought to have been a non-violent sacrifice was converted into a violent affair by Krishna, who is acclaimed to be gentle and compassionate.

Immediately, after the Rajasuya sacrifice, Krishna set out to establish his claim to the title *"VASUDEVA"*. He went to Pundra, where the king called himself *"Vasudeva"* and killed him.

To sum up, KRISHNA was just a king whilst he was alive. He became a "god" only after his death. Abhiras, the people, who, at one time, destroyed Dwarka, brought Krishna back to life by making him their god. The Abhiras were cowherds and naturally, therefore they made their god a cowherd. They concocted stories of Krishna's supernatural and divine powers and qualities including the romantic pranks and making love to the innocent young milkmaids or *"gopis"*. Thus, it is crystal clear that Krishna was no god but was made a god by the Brahmins, to whom, being a priestly class, Krishna as a god was more useful than as a Kshtriya king.

CHAPTER - III

THE ROLE OF BHISHMA IN THE STORY

BHISHMA is said to be a born cursed being. For some unexplained reason, the celestial damsel GANGA was compelled to leave the upper world and live for a time on the earth. At about the same time, Vasishtha had cursed eight *vasus* to be born as mortals on earth. The *vasus* came to Ganga and begged of her: "let us be born of your womb. Kill us as soon as we are born and thus release us from the world of mortals, where we have been cursed to live." Ganga promised to do so. Ganga was a goddess, having extraordinary external beauty, and as she was a celestial being, the ordinary rules of decency by human mortals on earth did not apply to her. And so she went straight to King Pratipa and sat on his lap and said: "I want to marry you. (She did not say: "Please marry me"). The King replied: "Lady, if you wanted that I should marry you, you should have sat on my left lap, and not on my right lap. The right lap belongs to the son or the daughter-in-law. Let a son be born to me and then I will ask him to marry you." Ganga agreed to this for all that she wanted was a man to have intercourse with him to enable her to beget the eight vasus as her children. It mattered little whether it was the father or the son, provided he does the

sexual act. Some time later, Pratipa begot a son and he named him Shantanu. When Shantanu came of age, Partipa retired to the forest, leaving the kingdom to his son. Shantanu, like other Kshtriyas, was fond of hunting. Once, whilst on the banks of the river Ganga, he saw a beautiful damsel. The damsel was Ganga, the celestial being, temporarily on earth as a human mortal. The hunter became the hunted! He begged her to marry him. Gaṇga agreed to marry him but laid down a peculiar condition. She told the King that she would do what she liked and would do things which he might not consider proper but he must neither prevent her from doing those things nor should he blame her for doing those things. If and when he did that, she would leave him. The infatuated lover agreed to her condition, and Ganga became his wife. Ganga gave him every pleasure but every time a child was born, she would take the child to the river and drown it in the waters. Shantanu was very grieved but since he was very much in her power, he used to keep his trap shut. At last, when she took the eighth child to the river, he could restrain himself any longer. "At least, do not kill this one. O terrible woman", he burst out. This was what Ganga wanted and was waiting for. "I will spare this child but according to our agreement, I am leaving you," she said. She vanished with the child. After a number of years, one day she reappeared before Shantanu and returned his son. whom she had named Devarrata, and who had now become a full grown youth, trained in the arts and culture of a Kshtriya. Shantanu took his son to the capital and made him the crown prince.

Some years passed. Shantanu was as fond of hunting as ever. Even in his advanced age, he became a prey to a beautiful damsel, whom he saw whilst hunting. This damsel was Sathyavathy. the daughter of Dasharaja. a chief amongst fishermen. When Shantanu asked the damsel to marry him. it was Sathyavathy's father laid down a condition. "I will give you my daughter if you promise that her son will inherit the kingdom" said the bride's father. To this, Shantanu did not agree as he loved his son dearly. Shantanu returned to the capital dejected. He gave up hunting and remained indoor leading a sad life. His son Devarata. asked him several times the cause for his sorrow and dejection but Shantanu would give evasive answers. Devarata tried hard to find out what his father had meant when he remarked, in answer to his question as to why he was dejected. (His father had said: "Son. What have I to worry about, with a fine son like you to look after my kingdom? The only thing which concerns me is that you are my only son. If something happens to you, what will become of my kingdom?") The son made thorough and discreet enquiries from the servants and found out the whole story of his father's love affair with the fisherman chieftain's daughter. Without telling his father, Devarata went along with the Chief Minister and other courtiers to the damsel's house and asked the girl's father for her hand on behalf of his father. When Dasharaja stated his condition, Devarata declared before the assembled people that he would not claim the kingdom. Dasharaja was not satisfied. He said: "Even if you don't, your children will fight with my daughter's children for

the throne." It was then Devarata took a "terrible" vow that he would remain unmarried for the whole of his life. Because of this terrible vow, Devarata, henceforth, came to be known as *"Bhishma"* for, in Sanskrit, 'Bhishma' means 'terrible'. Dasharaja was satisfied and Satyavathy became his father's wife and his step-mother. This was the only thing for which he was "blessed"; in all other things, he was a "cursed" being.

Satyavathy gave birth to two sons. While they were yet children, Shantanu died. Bhishma, as the eldest brother and guardian, put Sathyavathy's first son on the throne, but he died soon after. The second son, Vichitravirya became the king. ... To find a bride for the king and thus ensure a heir to the throne, Bhishma went to a "swayamvara" (a ceremony in which a bride chooses her husband) of the three princess of Kashi and abducted all the three of them. Amba, the eldest princess told Bhishma that she loved Shalva and was to have married him. Hence, he permitted her to go to Shalva's place and marry the boy of her choice. He had the two other princess married to Vichitravirya. Unfortunately, from the time Amba was permitted to go to Shalva's place at Kashi from Hastinapura, some weeks had elapsed. When Amba reached Shalva's place, the former refused to marry her because she had been in the company of another so long. She was sent back to Hastinapura. Amba went to Bhishma and said; "Since you abducted me and brought me to Hastinapura and because of this abduction, my lover Shalva refuses to marry me; no one else also will marry me. So you must marry me and save my honour." Bhishma

refused giving his oath of celebacy as the reason for his refusal. Slighted, dishonoured, shelterless (all because of Bhishma) Amba committed suicide by burning herself, cursing Bhishma profusely for ruining her life. Amba was the first person whom Bhishma had injured and who had cursed him. Subsequently, in course of his long life, he injured several others and incurred the curses of several others!

Vichitravirya died soon after his marriage without any issue. Satyavathy's hopes for her sons ruined. The entire Karu line was threatened with extinction. Satyatvathy pitifully begged Bhishma to accept the throne and re-establish the Kuru line by giving up his terrible vow. In the alternative, at least, beget children by his brother's wives. Bhishma refused but hit on a disgraceful idea. Satyavathy had a son named Vyasa born to her through a Brahmin before her marriage to Shantanu. Thus, Vyasa was a half brother of Vichitravirya and half-brother-in-law of Vichitravirya's widowed queens. Bhishma instigated Satyavathy to let Vyasa sire sons through Vichitravirya wives. Accordingly. Stayavathy went to her eldest daughter-in-law and asked her to prepare herself to receive her 'brother-in-law' in her bed that night. The girl thought that the 'brother-in-law' would be Bhishma or any other handsome young Kuru warrior-prince. To her horror, when the girl saw a black, red-eyed human beast coming to her bed to commence the process of begetting a heir to the throne of Hastinapura through her body, she swooned. The Brahmin brute, who had been assigned that 'noble' task, did not hesitate to impregnate the girl, though she lay

unconscious. He completed his mission and left her to her fate. The girl conceived and when the off-spring of that union was born, it was born blind. The offspring was a boy Dhritarashtra who later became the king of Hastinapura and father of the hundred Kauravas, the arch enemies of the five Pandavas.

As the would-be heir to the throne was born blind, Sathyavathy, as per Bhisma's sagacious (?) advice, sent the human stud bull to the second wife of Vichitraviya. The poor helpless girl, on seeing the children-producing monster, turned white with fright. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son as a result of the forced intercourse with the monster. The son born was an albino child. The child was named PANDU, who later became the father of the five *Pandavas*. It must be noted that *"PANDU"* means "white". Again, since the prospective heir to the throne of Hastinapura was imbecile, Sathyavathi (again with the sagacious advice and blessings of Bhishma) arranged to send Vyasa to impregnate the King's wife. The widowed queen managed to substitute a servant maid, in her place and the children producing human machine Vyasa indulged in sexual intercourse with a lady who lay on the bed on the bed. It mattered little to him as to lay on the queen's bed - the queen or her servant maid. He was entrusted with the task of impregnating and he, duty bound, impregnated the lady on the queen's bed. The mating of Vyasa with the "LOW-BORN" servant maid resulted in the birth of VIDURA.

It will not be out of context if it is mentioned here, at this point, that Bhishma incurred the curses of the two widowed wives of Vichitravitya for arranging to obtain a heir to the throne of Hastinapura through such a wicked and shameful method..

Another act of Bhishma, which bears eloquent testimony to his "chilvalry" and "moral courage" is the silence he observed when Draupadi was dragged into Dhritashtra's Court and was disrobed. Instead of stopping the shameful act or at least running away from the scene to avoid witnessing such a shameful spectacle, Bhishma sat there discussing the meaning, the importance and the need for *"dharma"* (truth & justice).

To sum up. there can be no better description of Bhishma than the the words of Shisupala. who uttered them at the time of Yudhishtrya's Rajasuya yagna. When Bhishma, instead of claiming himself or approving Shisupala's claim that Bhishma should receive the honour of being the Special Guest at the yagna, tried to show that Krishna will be a better choice. Shishupala burst out in anger: "BHISHMA" your whole life is a blot on the name of the Kshtriyas. Though it was known to all including yourself, that Amba had been promised to Shalva. you abducted her; your brother, being a saintly king, did not marry her and so, naturally, she came to you but you rejected her and in desperation, she committed suicide. Thus, you killed her. After your brother died, his queens were yours by right. You should have yourself sired their children. Instead, you chose to secretly have a Brahmin

father their children. The one and only reason you have been saying is that you had taken a vow of celebacy. You say you are a celebate. No. You are not a celebate. You are impotent and a coward. Here and now, when it is proper that you, as the senior-most and most eligible Kuru Kshtriya, should receive the special honour, you stand meekly singing Krishna's praises. Shame on you, Bhishma. Shame ! Shame !

CHAPTER IV

THE ROLE OF KUNTI IN THE STORY

KUNTI whose real name Pritha , is the wife of Pandu, daughter of King Shurasena and the mother of the five Pandavas. Shurasena had a bosum friend and cousin called Kuntibhoja. who was childless. It was usual in those days for issueless Kings to approach Brahmins and seek not just their blessings but physical assistance in order to get a child. The chosen Brahmin would be invited to be their guest, fed luxuriously and waited upon by the daughter or the daughter-in-law of the house, who surrendered her field to be cultivated by him . Since Shurasena did not have even a daughter, he requested his friends Kuntibhoja to give Kunti as a gift. Shurasena agreed and gifted away his daughter, as though she is a mere chattel and not a human being. The adoptive father employed Kunti to serve and win the favour of a Brahmin sage named Durvaso. This brahmin was so well served day and night physically by Kunti that he went away mentally pleased and satisfied. Before he departed, he prophisied and promised that Kuntibhoja will have a good progency, (which means that Kunti will beget children.) The Brahmin gave Kunti some 'mantaras' (magic formulae) through which she could compel any god to come to her

and beget sons through her. Kunti recited the 'mantaras' and called upon the Sun-god to come and impregnate her. The Sun-god came as summoned and fulfilled her desire. (In the Mahabharatha ther are umpteen incidents of Kshtriya women having pre-marital sexual relations with Brahmins and /or gods and begetting children to see that the throne does not go unrepresented by a heir: for example Kunti's own grand mother-in-law Sathyavathy shared her bed with a Brahmin and had a child through him before her marriage, Kunti conceived as a result of the Sun-god mating her. Her old nurse kept the whole affair a close secret. When the baby was born, she put it in a box along with with a lot of gold and floated the box on a small river. This child - a boy - who is said to have been born with *"Kundalas"* (ear ornaments) and "Kavacha" (armour), was found by a man of the Suta class, who brought him up as his own son and who named him Vasusena. This boy is the KARNA of the Mahabharatha. KARNA did not know who his real father was but something within him would say that that he is not a Suta but a Kshtriya. Kunti did not know nor did she bother to know about the fate of her Sun-god fathered boy. Even years later, when she did come to know that Karna was her own son, she did not have the heart and moral courage to openly acknowledge him as her own son.

Kunti was such a noble lady that she begot (apart from Karna, whom she gave birth through, the Sun-god) three other sons through three other gods, namely Yama, the god of Death, Marut. the god of winds and storms and Indra. the King of gods!

CHAPTER V

THE ROLE OF DRAUPADI IN THE STORY

DRAUPADI, the common wife of five husbands, is depicted in the Mahabharatha as a living symbol and powerful source of unity and solidarity amongst the five Pandava brothers, though Karna says about her: **"The wife of five husbands is no better than a strumpet".** Arjuna won her in an archery competition and brought her home and told his mother in jest that he had brought a juicy apple from the forest. His mother was inside the house and he outside. His mother Kunti, unwittingly, asked him to share the fruit equally with his brothers, as always. When she saw that the "fruit" was a young girl, she ought to have - any decent sensible woman would have done that - withdrawn her statement. And no sensible and decent man would have taken what was said unwittingly so seriously and taken it to be such a powerful command, which ought not to be disobeyed, happen what it may. Dharma asked his younger brother Arjuna to marry her. Prima facie, it appeared as if Arjuna was showing due respect to his elder brother but actually it was a sinster design. Outwardly, he posed as if he did not want to commit a sin but he knew that if his elder brother married Draupadi he would not lose anything, as according to the then prevailing custom, younger brothers had access to an

elder brother's wife. As the discussion about who should marry Draupadi was going on, the eyes of the five brothers were fastened on her with unconcealed desire. Kunti was a shrewd observer. She sought the advice and assistance of the Brahmin sage Vyasa. Through Vyasa's stratagem, the dilemma was solved so that Draupadi was married to all the five brothers simultaneously, individually and collectively. The marriage thus destroyed any possible seed of dissention amongst the five brothers!

In one Purana, it is said :
In the Kritayuga **RENUKA** as **Kritya**
In the Satyayuga. **SITA** was **Kritya**
In the Devaparayuga. **DRAUPADI** was **Kritya** and
In the Kaliyuga, **EVERY WOMAN** is a **Kritya**'!

From this it is clear that Draupadi was the main cause for the Mahabharatha war as she was a 'Kritya' which means "a demonic female, who is the cause for bloodthirsty fueds".

CHAPTER VI

THE ROLE OF KARNA IN THE STORY

KARNA was the bastard son of Kunti, who begot him through a pre-marriage sexual union with the Sun-god. Technically speaking, he might be Kshtriya as he was the product of a celestial being and a Kshtriya princess, but he was, for all intends and purposes, a Suta as he was brought up by Suta adoptive parents Adhiraja and his wife Radha. Though the Suta pair brought him up as their own son, they did not hide it from him that he was not born to them. He had heard from them how he had been found in a box with gold and ear-rings and the armour of a Kshtriya. Putting two and two together, he could guess that his parents might have been Kshtriyas and he was therefore a Kshtriya. He was hopeful that some day, his Kshtriya parents will acknowledge him as their Kshtriya son. Though he loved dearly his foster-parents, he was not prepared to spend his life among them as a Suta. As a Suta, he was not allowed to train in weaponry and so he disguised himself as a Brahmin to be accepted as a pupil. When it was accidentally discovered by his Brahmin teacher Parashurama. the latter cursed him saying that he would forget everything he had learnt exactly at the moment of crisis and when he was in a dangerous

position. He was so cursed because he was a Suta - a low caste man - and all the arts of war were open only to the members of the upper-caste, the Brahmins and the Kshtriyas.

KARNA suffered because all Sutas and low-caste people were supposed, by the upper-caste people, to be born to only to suffer! And since he suffered, he enjoyed vicarious pleasure in making people or seeing them suffer. For example, it was he who was mainly responsible for inducing the Kauravas to degrade Draupadi. When Draupadi was dragged to the court, there arose a debate and a dispute as to whether she was a slave or not, and when Vikarna. a younger brother argued mildly that it was unseemly to put an upper-caste woman to shame in this manner, it was Karna, who got up in great anger and shouted at the top of his voice : "The wife of five husbands is no better than strumpet. There is nothing wrong in dragging her to the men's assembly. She and her five husbands are all nothing but slaves now and as slaves they do not even own the clothes they wear. Strip them of their finery." On hearing this, the Pandavas, immediately, took off their upper garments and Duhshashana started to disrobe Draupadi. Thus, it was at Karna's instigation that Draupadi was disrobed.

Karna had yet another personal reason for degrading Draupadi. Karna too along with Arjuna attempted to compete in the archery competition in order to win her but Draupadi haughtily rejected him on the ground that he was low-born. Until he instigated, the Kauravas had not

thought of insulting Draupadi. There was no justification to dishonour the wife of a defeated men. Karna had no locus standi to take part in the quarrel between cousins. But. he not only participated in it but also became so much involved in it that he bade goodbye to all decent humane considerations.

Again, at the time of "ghoshayatra" or cattle-inspection, Kạma did not behave as a warrior ought to behave. He acted like a coward. In those days, kings used to possess large herds of cattle, which they kept in pastures near the borders of their kingdom and these pastures were generally surrounded by forests, which constituted a sort of no-man's land between two kingdoms. Once in a while, the king would visit the herds and see that the new calves are branded with the royal symbol. When the Pandavas were in their exile, they were living in the forest adjoining the pastures of the Kaurava prince Duryodhana. Duryodhana, under the pretext of inspection of his herds of cattle, went along with his numerous wives and concubines, slaves, retainers and other courtiers, in a number of chariots, to the pastures. The real idea was to flaunt the ill-gotten wealth of the Kauravas before the Pandavas, who were living in abject poverty. At that time, a quarrel broke out between the Kauravas and members of the Gandharva clan, who had come there picknicking. The Gandharvas gave the Kauravas a good drubbing. In the skirmish, Duryodhana was taken prisoner, whilst Karna ran away to save his skin. When Karna's cowardly act was discovered by Bhishma, the latter remarked : "your much vaunted respect and love for Duryodhana is

nothing but a pretence, for how could you think of saving your own life when your friend and benefactor's life was in danger?"

Whilst he was at height of power, Karna gave scant regard for *Dharma* but when his chariot, during the Kureksheta war, got stuck up and he found Arjuna ready to finish him off, he called upon Arjuna to "fight according to the *'dharma'* of battle." To this Krishna gave a reply thus : "Did your remember *'dharma'* when you incited Duhsashana to strip Draupqdi ? Did you remember your *'dharma'* when six of you in your chariot killed Abhimanu standing alone on the ground?".

CHAPTER VII

THE ROLE OF BRAHMINS IN THE STORY

In the Mahabharatha. the role of Brahmins is not central. Yet, it is important even if one dismisses some Brahmin characters therein and their expolits as entirely false and extraneous later interpolations. The two Brahmins, who have an important role are : DRONA and his son ASHVATTHAMA. Drona comes into the picture, when the Pandavas and Kauravas are small children or young boys. Drona, who was skilled in all weapons, was the brother-in-law of Kripa. the hereditary teacher of the Kuru clan at Hastinapura. Unable to find a good position in any Court, he was driven to desperation by poverty. Besides, he was smarting from an insult he suffered at the hands of King Drupada. In his dire need, he had gone to the King and appealed to him 'in the name of their friendship of student days' for help. Draupada had laughed derisively at the word "friendship" and had said that "friendship" could exist only between people of equal status. Draupada might have given Drona a good post in his Court if he had sued for assistance as a poor Brahmin; he could not tolerate Drona's claim to equality on the basis of their companionship during the student days. Wounded at the slight, Drona came to Hastinapura and

approached Kripa and through him to Bhishma. Bhishma appointed him as a teacher NOT of religious learning but of weaponry to the young princes - the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Drona never forgot the insult and he never forgave Draupada. He called upon his disciple Arjuna to exhibit his regard and love for his teacher by defeating Draupada. When Draupada was brought a prisoner by Arjuna before Drona, Drona confiscated half of Draupada's kingdom and haughtily exclaimed " We are equals now, King Draupada."

Drona hated King Draupada so much that he hated the latter's daughter, Draupadi, too, without rhyme or reason. It was his hatred towards Draupada which made him enjoy the spectacle of Draupada's daughter Draupadi being stripped naked, throwing to the winds, *'Dharma'* and also other so-called excellent Brahminical qualities.

Whilst Bhishma was alive and active. Drona enthusiastically echoed whatever the former said. But after Bhishma's fall, quite a different Drona appears, in a typical Brahminical manner!

It was Drona who killed Abhimanyu, the young son of Arjuna in a ruthless manner violating all codes and canons of warfare and chivalry. Forgiveness, serenity and self-control are acclaimed to be Brahminical virtues in the Gita but none of them apply to Drona. The role he played was contemptible, to say the least. In the Battle Dhrishtadyumma held tightly on Drona's chariot and shouted: "We, Kshtriyas, would have a chance to survive if you Brahmins minded your own profession and did not take up arms. Non-violence to all creatures is the duty of the Brahmins and you are supposed to be a great Brahmin.

For the sake of your own son Ashvatthama, you mercilessly and without justification killed men of the warrior tribe of Melechha. who were following their own dharma. You abandoned yours and butchered them. Have you no shame? Ashvatthama is dead and gone; for whom are now living" Ashvatthama was the name of Drona's son and also the name of an elephant. Bhima had killed the elephant named Ashvatthama, Drona thought his son Ashvatthama was killed and so his spirit sank when he heard Dhrishtadyumma's words.

Ashvattahama was Drona's son. Like his father, instead of learning Brahminial' lore and leading the life of a Brahmin, he became an expert in the use of arms. Caught in an endless chain of injury and retaliation, Ashvattama's deeds were unequalled in horror and cruelty. Ashvatthama speaks about himself to Kripa. who tried to dissuade him from attacking the Pandavas when they were sleeping: "You tell me to act like a Brahmin, but I have never learned the Brahmin code. From childhood onwards all I have learned is weaponry. I was born in a high Brahmin family but. unlucky that I am. I have lived as a Kshtriya. Now let me follow that dharma."

CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

The Mahabharatha is not a divine revelation. It is not a religious scripture. It is just a long story of a quarrel between royal cousins for the possession fo property and status. Such quarrels have been and are still fought on various scales in several and in almost all families in our country and throughout the world. The theme of the epic is universal and yet it is specifically about a Kshtriya royal family. A few Brahmins are there in the story but Vaishyas and Shudras are not all mentioned. The relationship between the two 'upper-caste' people namely the Brahmins and the Kshtriyas, shows rivalry and at the same time mutual dependence. The Kshtriyas needed the services of the Brahmins to propitiate gods and goddesses, officiate at their life cycle rituals, perform coronations and yagnas proclaiming their legitimacy and supremacy. And the Brahmins needed the protection and patronage of the Kshtriyas to preserve their distinctive identity and elevated status. All that one can gather from the epic is that Vaishyas were engaged in farming, herding cattle and trade and commerce, while the Shudras were nothing but human beasts and slaves of all the three upper classes and castes! When Buddhism rose in India, the social status of

the Brahmins changed and became lower. **(This is the main reason why Brahmins crushed Buddhism!).** The Vaishyas, as rich supporters of the monastic religion, gained importance. The Vaishyas became exalted and they, instead of the Kshtriyas, became heroes of the Buddhist stories. Due to the rise in importance, the Vaishyas gave up farming and cow-herding and became "sowcars" (money-lenders) and 'zamindars' (landlords). The Shudras took over farming, minor artisanship and other occupations requiring hard labour. The were technically free but still could be freely sold and bought as slaves.

In the Mahabharatha, the ideal of a woman's loyalty to her husband is strangely horrible. It was held acceptable-nay, respectable - to get one's wife impregnated by another man (read Brahmin) if one does not have a heir!.

The social order was 'upper-castes' dominated and male dominated. There is scant concern in the epic for moral values.

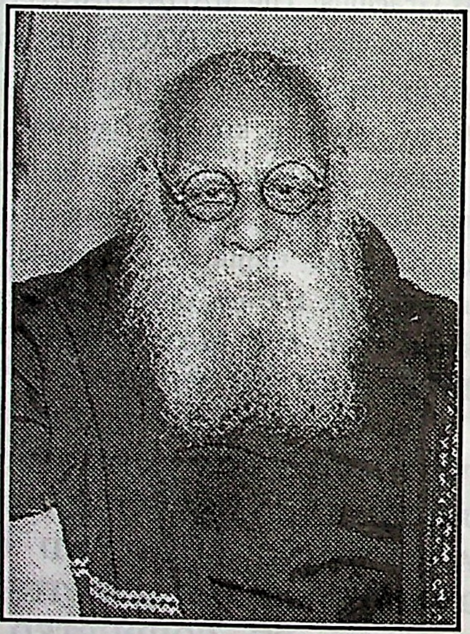
The Mahabharatha does not decry eating of beef. As a matter of fact, the Pandavas, during their exile, subsisted on hunting. While in the forest, they supported many Brahmins, who conducted yagnas and sacrifices, and these Brahmin, too, partook of the game, which included cows and bullocks. Besides, various animals are mentioned as appropriate offerings in the sacrificial fire to gods. What people eat, they offer to their gods and reversely whatever is offered to the gods is consumed by the people. Horses and goats and cows were certainly sacrificed. Hence, the

inference is that beef was eaten (by the Brahmins too!). Hence, it finds no special mention nor there is any specific prohibition.

Goodness Gracious! The MAHABHARATHA approves the obnoxious practice of "NIYAGA" or co-habitation Kshtriya *wives by Brahmins* for the purpose of production of a heir, if and when a king is issueless. Besides, it shamelessly, speaks of gods, who seem to have no other or no better work than to specialize in the art of impregnating Kshtriya unmarried damsels and giving them sons as their gift. **Hence, it is suffice to conclude by remarking that the MAHABHARATHA IS A STORY WHICH CAN BE HEARD OR READ OR SEEN AS A MOVIE ONLY BY MALES, WHO ARE INTERESTED IN DIRTY ROMANTIC FOLKLORE OR MYTHOLOGICAL BATTLES AND NOT BY DECENT LADIES AND YOUNG BOYS AND GIRLS OF IMPRESIONABLE AGE, BECAUSE THEIR MINDS ARE BOUND TO BE CORRUPTED BY THE CORRUPT TALES CONTAINED THEREIN!**

- More in our next issue, God Willing.

DEDICATION



Respectfully dedicated to
the world famous revolutionary leader
Thanthai Periyar Erode
V. Ramaswami Naicker
in recognition of the yeoman services
rendered by him to the masses by helping
them to sift the chaff from the grain.